



people
serving
people



Ashford Borough
Council
Annual Report
2015 - 2016

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GERRY CLARKSON, CBE

LEADER, ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Welcome... To the third of our Annual Reports. The report reflects on the achievements and milestones seen across our borough over the course of the last year.

From hosting the National Tourism Symposium to work now well underway on a new International College at the heart of the town, there is much to celebrate and be proud of.

Exciting future plans have come forward for a 100,000 square foot expansion of the Designer Outlet, alongside a new cinema and restaurant complex in the town centre.

Alongside the opening of a stunning new country park at Conningbrook Lakes, and Ashford bucking the trend and increasing the number of people visiting the town, we

are hopefully beginning to make a significant difference to Ashford as a really good place to live, work and play.

This is not to say that we are in any way complacent – indeed in December we agreed a new 5 Year Plan for Aspiration, Action and Achievement, which builds upon our current successes with a comprehensive plan for the next four years. I look forward to sharing news of Ashford's continued progress with you all in next year's Annual Report.



TRACEY KERLY

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Along with Ashford's attraction for national and international companies, the council also looks to reinvigorate its local businesses – and there are several innovative commercial initiatives which you will read about in this report.

While we've been supporting and encouraging these enterprises we've also been focussing on our existing and future residents. A growing borough needs more housing, and our systems help to provide a fast approach to planning while ensuring that quality remains a key priority.

But we're also aware that our growing borough is a changing borough, so we've also been focussing on our ageing population through the early phases of our care-ready homes – both in Ashford and Tenterden.

Through partnership working and careful planning, these homes help our residents to maintain their independence, and also help to reduce costs and dependencies in social care and the health service.

It's important, too, that our communities remain vibrant and you can read about our culture and our communities (pages 12 and 13) as well as our efficient and effective services (pages 14 and 15).

I hope you enjoy this report, and I hope you will take the opportunity to give us some feedback by responding to the short form on the back page.

THE UK'S INTERNATIONAL TOWN

38
MINUTES
from
LONDON



3.6 MILLION
.....
PASSENGERS
travel through
ASHFORD
INTERNATIONAL STATION each year



.....
Internationally
.....
CONNECTED





PARIS 1hr 52mins
away

BRUSSELS 1hr 37mins

LILLE 56mins

OFFICE RENT
73%
LOWER than
LONDON




NUMBER 1
BUSINESS
LOCATION in Kent


SUPERFAST 4G

IN THE
**TOP
TEN%**
of the most
DESIRABLE
PLACES TO LIVE

TOURISM brings in over
4 MILLION
VISITORS PER YEAR

TO OVER
30
attractions
across the borough
£270
MILLION
PER YEAR

224.5 SQ
MILES
the largest borough in
KENT

ONLY
UNPOLLUTED
DARK SKIES
in the SOUTH EAST

MORE THAN
3,000,000
PEOPLE VISIT
THE OUTLET EACH YEAR

OVER
80
DESIGNER
BRANDS

183,000
SQ FEET

jobs and **economic** growth

Ashford - the best business location in Kent

Since being named the best place in the county to do business by the county's investment and relocation experts Locate In Kent, more and more businesses are moving to the borough. Indeed, Locate In Kent acted on their own findings and recently relocated to the borough. They share space in International House with the Swedish-owned bank Handelsbanken, who also opened a new office in the Commercial Quarter development this last year.

Ashford's location is one of its most significant assets, with unrivalled road and rail links to the rest of the country and the continent. In fact, the International Station is one of the top 8% busiest stations in the UK. The exciting developments at the Commercial Quarter will take advantage of this connectivity, stimulating major investment opportunities, creating hundreds of jobs and 590,000 square feet of office space.

Plans are underway at the nearby Elwick Place for a boutique cinema, family hotel, restaurants and bars. These received planning permission in December, and alongside the already-approved plans to expand the Designer Outlet with 40 new stores and six new restaurants and cafes, offers further proof of exciting developments in and around the town centre.

October saw the announcement of exciting plans to construct a state-of-the-art new brewery and visitor attraction in the heart of Ashford by Tenterden's award-winning winery Chapel Down. The brewery will enable them to grow their domestic and international distribution, and could be fully operational by December 2016 - subject to receiving planning approval. This was the result of a successful £1 million crowdfunding campaign.



Supporting local businesses

Ashford has bucked the national trend, increasing footfall into the town centre at a time when most others have seen a decline. Independent shops and traders are crucial to the success of the local economy, which is why the council purchased the Park Mall shopping centre in June as part of a proactive approach to support Ashford's high street. With an emphasis on quality, the area now includes the Made In Ashford business collective, alongside the popular haberdashery and crafts store Emporia and others.

The LoveAshford.com site continues to offer a 'digital high street', helping town centre traders to reach more customers and share offers and ideas, while the Farmers' Market provides a range of high quality stalls, music and entertainment each month. And so that visitors can find their way around the town as easily as possible, in January we improved and amended the town centre pedestrian signage in a new, contemporary and clear style.

Helping people gain skills and find employment

Whilst Ashford's unemployment remains below the national and county-wide average, it is crucial that Ashford's impressive business development is matched by employment for local people with the right skills. Demolition work began in August to pave the way for a new £16 million state-of the-art college campus in the heart of Ashford – set to welcome students from September 2017. The Ashford College will play a major part in the town's future growth and prosperity, providing local people with skills for the manufacturing, construction, technology and service sectors.



Quality homes across the borough

It is important that we keep growing the borough and providing the homes all residents need. Building is underway to create a new thriving community at Finberry near Sevington, whilst proposals have come forward to provide more than 800 homes close to the International Station on the former Powergen site.

Work will also begin soon at Chilmington Green, with the development of up to 5,750 quality homes. There will also be schools and infrastructure, including major dualling of the A28, and the creation of over 1,000 jobs over the next 20 years.

We know that a helpful, fast approach to planning helps businesses and homeowners greatly. That is why we have adopted the 'Ashford Model' – an insistence on quality of both design and build to create lasting communities.

During the year we received over 1,600 planning applications, including almost 1,400 from householders and companies seeking to develop their homes and businesses. We know it's important to decide upon these quickly, so we turned around three quarters of these within eight weeks – and approved over 90%.

Innovative solutions to help residents afford their home

Ashford has long prided itself on being the leading provider of rural affordable homes in the county, whilst embracing innovative solutions to meet demand. In November, 13 such new affordable homes - alongside eight shared ownership properties - opened in Charing. This was on top of the almost 400 homes already completed in Ashford through the government's Affordable Homes Programme.

The council's innovative social lettings agency helps those who may not otherwise be able to afford to rent in the private sector.



This leadership on delivering housing for residents across the borough was recognised in March, when the government declared Ashford 'Housing Business Ready' – acknowledging the way in which the council goes the extra mile, working with the private sector and using its own assets to provide local leadership.

Supporting the most vulnerable

Over the next ten years, 40% of Ashford residents will be aged over 50, and may require extra care and support. This is why the council plays its part in supporting those who need additional help to lead fulfilling lives.

In January work was completed on phase one of the new dementia-friendly accommodation at Farrow Court. The new accommodation will offer a total of 104 high-quality living spaces, including eight recuperative care units for people released from hospital who need additional respite care before they can return to their homes, and 12 units for people with learning disabilities.

The council has also recently been awarded nearly £2 million towards the cost of providing care-ready homes at Danemore in Tenterden. Such housing helps people to remain as independent as possible, for as long as possible, in a home suited to their needs. This also plays an important part in helping to reduce costs and dependencies in areas such as social care and the health service.

The recent humanitarian crisis in Syria shocked the world. Ashford is proud that the borough has committed to welcome up to 50 refugees per year for the next five years as part of the government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. These families have been provided with private sector accommodation and support to help them settle into their new local communities.



highlights

throughout the year

APRIL

Ashford's digital high street, LoveAshford.com, was transformed with a new look, more features, offers and events

loveashford 

APRIL

MAY

MAY

With the launch of Eurostar's new direct services to the south of France, passengers can now travel from Ashford to Lyon, Avignon and Marseilles up to five times a week

JUNE

Ashford hosted the National Tourism Symposium, launching the new wine trail



JUNE

SEPTEMBER

Designer Outlet's 100,000 square foot expansion plans approved, creating an additional 700 jobs whilst adding 40 new stores, six restaurants and cafes



SEPTEMBER

AUGUST

JULY

JULY

The Ashford Farmers' Market, which offers local produce, music and entertainment, celebrated its first birthday

AUGUST

Work began on the new state-of-the-art £16million Ashford College, set to open in September 2017

OCTOBER

A series of sailing courses launched at the Conningbrook Lakes Country Park, run by the Sailing School of the Royal Cinque Ports Yacht Club



DECEMBER

Plans approved for a new six-screen cinema, 60-bed family hotel, 8 restaurants or bars at Elwick Place



MARCH

Plans approved for Repton Connect, a new community building and multi-use games area at Repton Park



NOVEMBER

NOVEMBER

As part of the new Poppy Fields development in Charing, the keys were handed over on 13 new affordable homes and eight shared ownership properties

JANUARY

JANUARY

To mark the completion of the first phase of public works between the International Station and Commercial Quarter, a magnificent art installation was unveiled – Ashford's 'Tree of Life'

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY

Work began on a new Spearpoint Pavilion, which will provide modern facilities and changing rooms

...Ashford's vibrant communities

Supporting our communities



Local facilities for sport and leisure form the focal point for many communities. That is why the council invested in new facilities in Willesborough, Kingsnorth and Bridgefield. Such facilities bring communities together by providing much needed spaces for local people and groups to use and enjoy. A new Spearpoint Pavilion in Kennington is also under construction, providing modern facilities to support local sports clubs.

In March planning permission was granted for Repton Connect – a new community building and multi-use games area in Repton Park. This centre will host sports clubs, educational courses, cooking workshops and social events.

In June the Intelligence Corps marked their 75th Anniversary with a Freedom Parade through Ashford. The march reaffirmed the bonds of friendship and support between the borough's communities and the armed forces – enshrined within the Armed Forces Covenant signed in 2014.

Play areas across the borough took part in a pilot initiative to create smoke-free play areas. This project has been very successful in providing a cleaner environment for children and their families to enjoy, whilst reducing the amount of cigarette litter.

We know that inappropriate lorry parking causes a variety of problems for local communities. That is why we launched a six-month pilot with the police and county council aimed at cracking down on nuisance lorry parking. The pilot was very successful, with a decrease in HGV parking in the three targeted locations. The pilot forms one part of the council's proactive work to discourage illegal lorry parking across the borough.



Tourism and the rural economy

Ashford is the third most visited destination in Kent for overseas visitors, and the total value of the industry to the borough is estimated at £270 million a year, supporting over 5,000 jobs. That is why the borough was proud to host the National Tourism



Symposium in June, attracting more than 240 leading industry professionals and high profile speakers from across the country.

The symposium also provided the perfect opportunity to launch a brand new wine trail, taking in Tenterden's award-winning vineyards – giving residents and visitors the chance to explore this glorious part of the borough while tasting some of Ashford's excellent local produce.

Conningbrook Lakes

In May Conningbrook Lakes Country Park formally opened to the public. The park reinforces the borough's reputation as a great place to live, work and relax, providing families with a variety of leisure and water-based activities in the heart of the North Downs.

Over 1,700 people of all ages attended an open day in September to try these activities out, including paddle boarding, archery and canoeing.

Culture, creativity and the Arts

In July, nearly 5,000 people braved heavy rains to celebrate 20 years of the Create Festival with a headline set from the 80's icon Adam Ant. The four day festival included Gaz Coombes playing a sell-out show at Revelation St Mary's, a Create-themed bandstand in the town centre and KINBAKU – a free multi-media show by members of the Jasmin Vardimon Dance Company.

The Create Festival also celebrated the 174th birthday of Mr George Harper, the man who gifted the Hubert Fountain to Ashford's Victoria Park, with a pre-festival picnic.

In March the council granted planning permission for the Ashford International Model Railway Education Centre (AIMREC). These ambitious plans aim to transform the old Klondyke Railway Works site in Newtown into an important tourist destination – embracing Ashford's railway heritage alongside the only model railway exhibition centre in the world.



...efficient and **effective** services

Entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency

In these times of reducing government funding, the council has embraced a more entrepreneurial approach to become self-sufficient. This will allow the authority to keep its share of council tax the lowest in Kent while making sure that its services aren't affected.

Over the summer the council purchased Park Mall and the Wilkinson store in the town centre. These not only provide the council with valuable income, but also give us the opportunity to breathe new life into this part of the town by welcoming new businesses and investing in the overall look and feel. This follows the purchase last year of International House as part of the ambitious plans for the Commercial Quarter.

Delivering efficient services

The council's entrepreneurial approach gives us the opportunity to innovate and make sure our services work for residents. In March the council's customer services returned to the Civic Centre. The council has seen a change in the way customers use our services, with an increasing number preferring to use online methods or self-help. With the introduction of Universal Credit, this change in location will support an improved customer experience, tailored to provide the right help for everyone and appointments for those with more complex enquires.

It is important that we work with others to achieve the best results for Ashford. That is why we signed a 'District Deal' with Kent County Council in January – the first of its kind in the county. This deal puts innovation, creativity and quality at the heart of what both councils are working to deliver for the borough's residents.



Ensuring quality and high standards

The council works hard to make sure that local businesses operate to high standards. Since the launch of the Food Hygiene Rating System in Ashford in 2012, the borough has seen a significant increase in the number of restaurants, cafes and hotels achieving the top rating of 5.

Building on the success of ratings for food premises, in June the council began a similar voluntary hygiene rating system for tattooists. This system gives such businesses the chance to showcase how clean their operations are, whilst giving customers the confidence that the artist is well trained and knowledgeable.

Since introducing a new recycling service in 2013, the amount recycled by residents has increased four-fold, and the council was nominated for Public Services Recycler of the Year. The borough now ranks as one of the most improved recycling areas in the country.

The council's proactive Town Centre Action Team (TCAT) ensures that our town centre stays clean, bright and beautiful. They maintain the standards of street furniture, signage, car parks and more – while getting involved with some wonderful community projects such as the free book stop by the bus stops in Park Street. The team now work all across the borough, and since October have also made regular visits to Tenterden.



Our plans for the next four years

Our Aspiration:

In December the council agreed a new direction and priorities for the future. This Corporate Plan – Aspiration, Action and Achievement – sets out the positive direction the council is taking to help the borough to grow, thrive and prosper in the coming years.

Whilst the next four years will be a challenging one for local authorities as they prepare for independence from central government funding, the council is committed to a proactive commercial approach – finding alternative ways to generate income and exploring innovative solutions to meet the demands of Ashford's growing population.

The council has four priority areas for the near future, supported by a set of underpinning principles.

Enterprising Ashford

Our Aspiration:

To promote growth and achieve greater economic prosperity for Ashford borough. We will work to secure inward investment to create a wide range of jobs carried out by a highly skilled workforce.

Living Ashford

Our Aspiration:

To secure quality homes across the borough, catering for a range of ages, tenures and need, in well planned and attractive new places.

Active and Creative Ashford

Our Aspiration:

To provide or enable a range of quality leisure and cultural activities where people can make healthy and affordable lifestyle choices and enjoy assets that create attractive, desirable and active communities.

Attractive Ashford

Our Aspiration:

To achieve an environment that creates higher standards of public space design, alongside improved standards of presentation of key green spaces. To safeguard and conserve our local heritage and areas of outstanding landscape quality to ensure the very best attractive environment with thriving and vibrant town centres.

Ashford's Underpinning Principles

Our Aspiration:

To remain a well-resourced council, with effective governance, high quality services, good communications, safe surroundings, demonstrating good compliance and high standards.

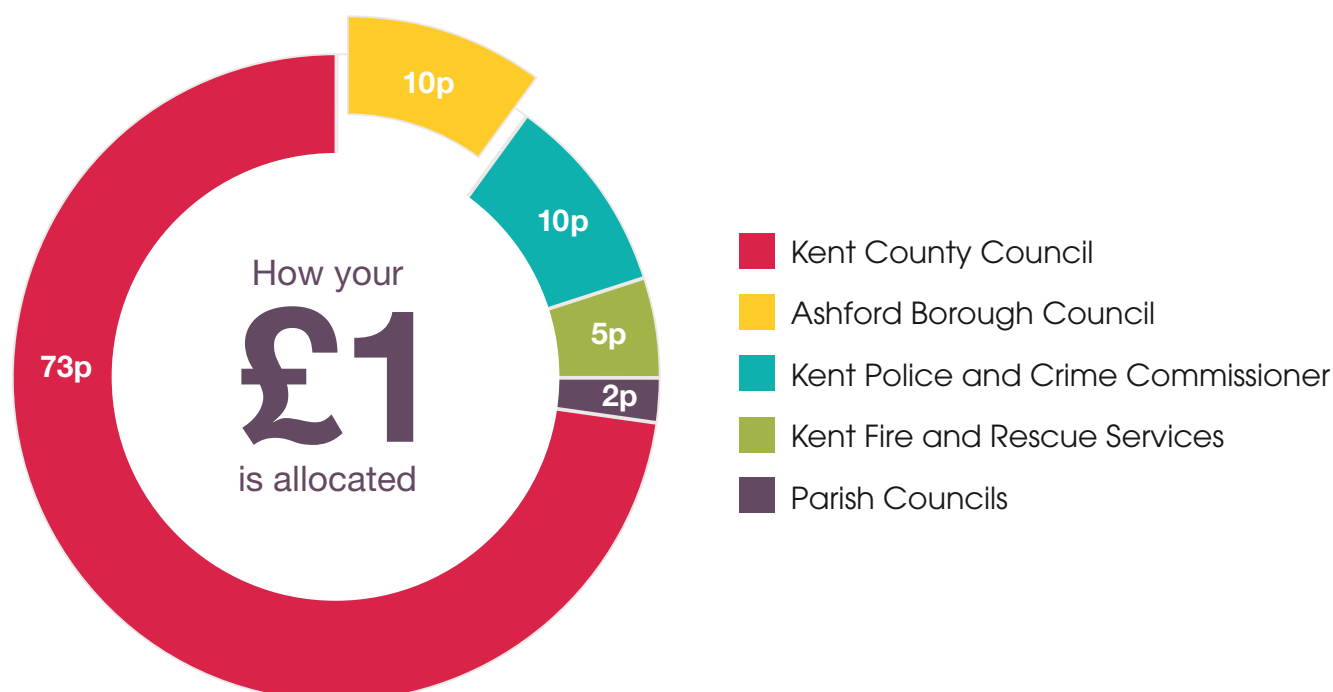
Financial Information

We realise that it is important not only to achieve much, but to do so while keeping our spending – and your council tax bills – to a minimum. This is why our council tax is the lowest in Kent (based on Band D council tax per average taxable property).

We have set a prudent budget for next year under difficult external funding conditions, which has limited the impact on front-line services whilst providing important investment in key areas to progress our priorities. Indeed, our auditors have checked our books and agree that we are not only financially resilient but also provide good value for money. This means we can work cost-effectively while also delivering services that residents are happy with.

Here's a summary of how we spent your money last year. To make sure we continue to offer real value, we manage and monitor our spending regularly to make sure they continue to meet our criteria and your standards.

The pie chart below shows where your council tax goes. Although Ashford Borough Council is responsible for collecting the council tax payments made by Ashford residents, we only keep around 10p for every £1 you pay to provide our own services, and distribute the rest to Kent County Council, Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue and the parishes.



The council's budget

Service	2015/16 £000	2016/17 £000	Per Head £
Cultural	1,804	1,851	15.01
Environmental	8,019	8,108	65.77
Planning	3,152	3,455	28.02
Highways & transportation	(333)	1,641	13.31
Housing	66,479	68,558	556.09
Central services to the public	7,661	9,033	73.27
Gross Expenditure	86,782	92,646	751.48
Less grants & other income	(73,013)	(78,547)	(637.12)
Net Expenditure	13,769	14,099	114.36
Contribution to/(from) Reserves	6	1,464	11.87
	13,775	15,563	126.24
Budget requirement financed by:			
Government Grant & NHB	(4,431)	(5,053)	(40.99)
Business Rates	(3,182)	(3,948)	(32.02)
Funding requirement	6,162	6,562	53.23

Would you like to know more?

As part of our efforts to be more environmentally-friendly and efficient in the way we communicate with our residents, we will mainly be issuing electronic copies of the Annual Report in the future.

Emails are a quick and a very cost effective way of communicating with our local community and allow us to easily share relevant news and advice or signpost where further information can be found, for example links to our website or online forms.

If you would like to receive useful information by email, all year round, or give your views on our services, please either follow the electronic link, scan the QR code below, or fill out the form (and return to the council offices at the address on the back cover).

www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/usefulinfo



Useful contacts

Ashford Borough Council

Contact us

www.ashford.gov.uk

Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent TN23 1PL

01233 330111

customer.care@ashford.gov.uk

- Pay bills online www.ashford.gov.uk/pay
- Apply for our services www.ashford.gov.uk/apply
- Report a problem www.ashford.gov.uk/report
- Make a benefits claim www.ashford.gov.uk/claim

Kent County Council

Contact KCC

www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/report-a-problem for:

Street lights, potholes, traffic signals, broken signs, overgrown trees



The information you provide will only be used by the council to keep you informed of local news and issues, and we will not pass on any of your details to any third party.

Name : _____

Email Address : _____

Postcode (so we can make sure we seek your views and send you updates relevant to your local area): _____

Are you either a resident of the borough, involved in running a local business, or both?: _____

What subjects would you like to receive further information on? (please tick as many as you like):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Ashford Borough Council Annual Report | <input type="checkbox"/> Key developments in the borough |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ashford Voice, the regular residents' magazine | <input type="checkbox"/> Business updates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> News | <input type="checkbox"/> Council services, such as council tax, benefits, housing, |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community events | <input type="checkbox"/> Ways in which you can offer your feedback on our services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waste and Recycling | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Planning applications near you | |